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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8731
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8681
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 002493

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: JAMMU AND KASHMIR: ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON
MODERATE SEPARATIST

REF: A. NEW DELHI 2455
[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 2356
[1](#)C. NEW DELHI 2355
[1](#)D. NEW DELHI 2208
[1](#)E. NEW DELHI 2155
[1](#)F. NEW DELHI 2135

Classified By: Acting DCM Uzra Zeya, Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

[1](#)1. Summary: (C) In a reminder that there are many Kashmir-focused terrorist groups who do not want any negotiation or accommodation with India, unidentified gunmen on December 4 shot Fazal-ul-Haq Qureshi, a prominent moderate separatist leader who was part of the recently announced GOI-Srinagar dialogue (reftels). Qureshi remains in serious but stable condition in a Srinagar hospital. The Jammu and Kashmir Police chief pointed the finger at the Hizbul Mujahideen. Mirwaiz Omar Farooq and other moderate separatist leaders pledged to continue the dialogue but the warning from the terrorists groups was unmistakable: that anyone who talks to the GOI does so at his own risk. The assault on Qureshi also demonstrates that groups such as the Hizbul Mujahideen feel threatened by a Delhi-Srinagar dialogue, which both sides appear to be approaching with a seriousness of purpose. The assassination attempt reinforces what Embassy argued in Ref B -- that one of the biggest obstacles to a successful outcome in the ongoing GOI-separatist dialogue remains the separatists' fear of assassination at the hands of terrorist groups. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Unidentified gunmen attempted to assassinate senior All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Fazal-ul-Haq Qureshi in Srinagar on December 4. Qureshi remains in critical but stable condition in a Srinagar hospital. He was shot in the head at point blank range as he was returning from a mosque on Friday. Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police (DGP) Kuldeep Khoda confirmed the shooting to PolFSN in a December 5 conversation.

[1](#)3. (C) Khoda told PolFSN that a shadowy group called al-Nasreen had claimed responsibility for the attack, which was carried out because Qureshi had been playing an important role in the dialogue initiated by the GOI with moderate separatists. Khoda said that the group is a front for the

terrorist group Hizbul Mujahideen. He said that he saw the indirect hand of APHC hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani behind the attack. According to Srinagar-based media reports, the al-Nasreen group issued a statement saying that "These veiled persons should denounce their behind the scenes talks with New Delhi or else be ready to face the consequences." A spokesman was reported to have said that his group tried to dissuade Qureshi from engaging in talks with the GOI but when he refused they had no option but to act against him.

¶4. (C) Sixty-five year old Qureshi, head of APHC-constituent People's Political Front, is one of the more moderate APHC leaders and has been committed to dialogue with India since ¶2000. He was actively engaged in the latest GOI-separatist closed-door discussions which were announced in October by Home Minister P. Chidambaram (Ref F). Qureshi has impeccable separatist credentials. He was a leading proponent of the armed struggle at almost every turn until 2000, and spent several years in jail. He was a founding member of the APHC in 1992 and maintained close ties with the Hizbul Mujahideen. He began to change his militant stripes in 2000, when he strongly supported a Hizbul Mujahideen ceasefire to begin talks with the GOI. The ceasefire was short-lived, but Qureshi has since then become an increasingly committed proponent of dialogue with India. He became an executive member of the APHC in 2003.

¶5. (U) Home Minister Chidambaram and APHC chief Mirwaiz Omar Farooq immediately announced that the GOI-separatist dialogue would continue. The Mirwaiz said that the APHC "would not be

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cowed down by such attacks" and "will not retreat" from the talks. Chidambaram called the attack on Qureshi a cowardly attempt to disrupt the peace process by forces "inimical to India." He acknowledged the Mirwaiz statement committing the separatists to the dialogue and pledged that the GOI would do the same. Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chief Yasin Malik, who has kept out of the GOI-separatist talks, condemned the assault, calling it "inhuman and brutal." Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that "this is the work of enemies of peace" and added that it will not slow the ongoing GOI-separatist discussions. Former Chief Minister and current UPA Renewable Energy Minister Farooq Abdullah called the assassination attempt "a great tragedy."

¶6. (C) DGP Khoda told PolFSN that the attack was "absolutely" a big setback to the peace process. He was pleased that the Mirwaiz had indicated that the Delhi-Srinagar talks would continue. Khoda, who will probably take some heat for not preventing the attack, told PolFSN that he had increased security for all the separatists engaged in the dialogue. He had also increased the security cover and surveillance around separatists such as Yasin Malik and Shabir Shah, who have not joined the Delhi-Srinagar dialogue and have refused GOI security.

¶7. (C) PolFSN called the Mirwaiz on December 5 to inquire about the assault on Qureshi. The Mirwaiz was appreciative that the Embassy had reached out, but was guarded over the phone. He displayed a resigned demeanor, saying "what does one do with these elements." He drew parallels with previous assassinations, including that of his father and other separatists who were forward leaning on peaceful solutions. AFP correspondent Izhar Wani told PolFSN that the attack on Qureshi is a direct warning from Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen to the Mirwaiz to desist from the dialogue with the GOI. Wani said the Mirwaiz is shaken and nervous.

¶8. (C) APHC leader Bilal Lone, who is part of the Delhi-Srinagar talks and whose father was gunned down in similar circumstances in 2002, told PolFSN that he personally was not afraid but such incidents leave the moderates with a sense of insecurity. He vowed that the moderate separatists will not be intimidated and would take the process to its "logical conclusion." At the same time, he conceded the

obstacles, saying that the hardliners and Islamabad must be brought along. In Lone's view, the assault on Qureshi demonstrates how desperate the extremists have become as the security situation improves and the talks get traction.

¶9. (C) Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society leader Parvez Khurram told Poloff that the closed-door, non-transparent nature of the Delhi-Srinagar talks has elicited a negative reaction in the valley. Khurram, whose organization continues to be an irritant to the security forces, said that many in the valley question what deals are being made behind closed doors. He believes that the separatists who are talking to the GOI have been isolated and discredited in the valley.

¶10. (C) Comment: The attempted assassination of a senior moderate separatist who actively espoused and engaged in dialogue with the GOI is a clear warning by Kashmir-focused terrorist groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen to Kashmiris who seek negotiations and accommodation with India. It is not a new strategy. They have used it repeatedly in the past to eliminate Kashmiri leaders who have shown an inclination to talk to the GOI. Their objective is to derail and disrupt dialogue even before it gets going. While it is encouraging that the Mirwaiz and other moderate separatists immediately issued statements pledging to continue the dialogue, it is inevitable that the attempted assassination of one of their colleagues will give them pause to consider the personal physical risks they are taking. The fear of such attacks remains a serious obstacle to a successful outcome in the

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GOI-separatist talks.

¶11. (C) Comment Continued: The assault on Qureshi demonstrates that groups such as the Hizbul Mujahideen have no interest in any solution that falls short of complete secession. It also shows that these groups feel threatened by a Delhi-Srinagar dialogue that both sides appear to be approaching with a seriousness of purpose.
ROEMER